Robert Anderson

Period 4

AP English Language and Composition

Outliers: The Formula to Success

**Section I: Introduction and Context**

The secret to success is continually sought after while we proceed in the daily activities of life. People find excuses about why they cannot reach the pinnacle of success and why they are forced to constantly struggle. Grumbling about being repressed in today’s society or not coming from a wealthy family are just some of the justifications on why the average human can not get ahead in this game we call life. Success, for the most part, is the financial stability and wealth that people are seeking in these hard economic times. Associated with well-being are some renowned names such as Bill Gates, owner of Microsoft, various stars and sport athletes, all of which have talents that set them apart from the average citizen. These people are known as the outliers of the society. However, this security, which comes with success, is not incredibly difficult to obtain, as some may believe. In-fact, according to *Outliers* by Malcom Gladwell, the secret to success can be formulated into four specific variables: Practice, Birthday, Preparation, and Opportunity.

**Section II: The Author’s Background**

The author of *Outliers* is Malcom Gladwell. Since 1996, he has been with the *New Yorker magazine*. He is also the author of two other novels *The Tipping Point* and *Blink*. All three books are “rigorous, intellectual mixtures of science, sociology, psychology and anecdote” (entertainment.timesonline.co.uk). His career is writing, it is his job, his trade, and his profession. In 2005, Malcom Gladwell was placed on Time Magazine’s 100 Most Influential People’s list. Before his job with the *New Yorker magazine*, Malcom Gladwell was a reporter with the Washington Post. While writing for the Washington Post, Gladwell covered articles on business and science. These topics are the similar topics he continues with currently. An alumnus of University of Toronto, Trinity College, he graduated with a degree in history (Gladwell.com). The author of *Outliers*, clearly is established within the field of writing, however the case that he can state how success is formed is all too easily proven.

Gladwell analyzed himself through the different aspects that he believed formed a successful person. The variable of success is practice. All too commonly we hear “Practice makes perfect6.4however. there are such a small amount of people who actually do practice at the craft. *Outliers* dedicates a whole chapter to the 10,000- Hour Rule. Giving examples of Bill Gates and the Beatles, Malcom shows exactly how many hours people need to spend in order to become a master of a talent. The 10,000- Hour Rule can also be accounted for by 10 years of constant repetition. Malcom himself fits this rule boasting a ten-year job at the Washington Post, which Gladwell says, “When I started there I was a lousy reporter and an indifferent writer. When I finished I was a good reporter and a much better writer.” (entertainment.timesonline.co.uk) Thus shows that Gladwell actually fits what he claims forms success.

The Birthdate also fit into Malcom Glawell’s own success story. Gladwell was hired in 1987, which was known to be a productive year which the Washington Post “hired anyone”. His birthday is in 1963, which Gladwell believed gave him an opportunity to succeed. The birthday gave way to opportunity that also fit Gladwell’s element for success. Finally the last condition for success is the preparation. Malcom states that his preparation comes from the number of drafts he has done in-order for his book to become a best seller. Many people do not realize that “Achievement is talent plus preparation.” (entertainment.timesonline.co.uk) Without the preparation there would hardly ever be true success.

Malcom Gladwell not only develops reasons for why others are successful, but when all is said and done, he compares himself with the same elements. Not many authors can state an opinion and use themselves as examples to back that same viewpoint. The argument Gladwell makes is reasonable and well defended. He states opinions and constantly gives facts, figures and research to vindicate the topic. Overall the argument of how to become successful is extremely persuasive and the author posse’s the credentials to support it.

**Section III: The Book’s Argument**

Maclom Gladwell is very successful at conveying an argument to prove the thesis. In *Outliers* Gladwell starts by identifying exactly what an outlier is. The introduction contains an excerpt from a dictionary on the definition of an outlier. (Gladwell) He continues to introduce a story about Roseto, Pennsylvania. He compares a study done on the Rosetans by Wolf (a man who was investigating why the people of Roseto had unhealthy habits but low rate of heart disease) to what he would be doing later in the book. The study went deep into the underlying reasons why the people of Roseto had such a low percent of heart disease. The reason why the study was used was to contrast the difference of topics, one health and the other success, but compare that they were both outliers and they both have underlying factors that cause them both.

The author uses other peoples experience and research to prove his points through out the book.

Another example of this technique is shown earlier in the novel as well. Gladwell explains how the birthdays of people, or in this example students in Ontario Junior Hockey League, affect their chances on succeeding in life. He explains how a man named Barnsley and his wife noticed a pattern with the players who played in the Major Junior A league. The pattern was that “seventeen out of the twenty five players on the team were born in January, February, March, or April”. (Gladwell) Not to mention in professional hockey forty percent of the players are born between January and March. All these dates are close to the cutoff date for hockey, which is January 1. The author then makes his case that the kids who are closer to the cut off dates have an advantage of growth and maturity compared to the kids born in October, which gives them an advantage to succeed. The author not only gives facts, statistics, and graphs to prove his point, but also uses an unbiased source to interview, which further compels the author’s argument.

The second argument of the book is that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to succeed. Malcom Gladwell picks two famous examples to analyze to show that 10,000 hours in-order to become a success. The practice, along with fine-tuning the student at the task, prepares the student for the future. The first example is the Beatles. The author starts by giving a quick synapse of who the Beatles are. Then he exploits the beginning of the Beatles before they came to America. He interviews Phillip Norman (the writer of the Beatles biography *Shout!*) about the roots of the Beatles. Norman explains how the Beatles were brought into a club in Hamburg and were forced to play for eight hours. In all, the band “performed live an estimated twelve hundred times”. (Gladwell) Clearly the Beatles are an example that fits Gladwells variables for success. Using the Beatles as an appeal to Ethos is an affective persuasive technique. Along with the Beatles, Bill Gates is also used as an appeal to Ethos to solidify Gladwells argument.

The third ingredient for success is opportunity. From the beginning of the book to the end, Gladwell is constantly analyzing each successful person’s opportunities in life. Whether it is Bill Gates’ rich background which gave him the time to put in the 10,000 hours of practice which made Gates prepared to deal with computers or the Borgenichts time period which made them able to make money, selling aprons in New York. (Gladwell) Opportunity to succeed is almost as crucial as the practice. The numerous examples given by Malcom Gladwell make his points persuasive to the reader and justifiable in the argument that success is formulated.

**Section IV: Opposing Points of View**

However there are opposing beliefs about how to become successful. Unlike Malcom Gladwell, other people believe that the “path to the success is not clearly defined”(geniustypes.com). There could be other “variables” that take role into formulating success. The belief of Brian Lee, writer of *Three Steps to Success for Creative Geniuses*, is that people face an extreme battle if they plan on pursuing a life of entrepreneurship, if they themselves are not wealthy. He states that the path to success is by following three steps: “Maximize Focus, Minimize Resistance, and Maximize Persistence”. (geniustypes.com) Brain Lee’s steps to success contrasts with Malcom Gladwell’s path to success.

Brian Lee’s first step to success is staying focused. He notes that there are many creative people. The problem is that creative people have difficulty staying focused. People are constantly multi-tasking throughout life. However the problem which arises when doing more than one task is that the talent to do this said task is diluted. Today’s society forces the average human to be a “jack of all trades and master of none”. By honing our ability to stay focused on a single task long enough to have it become complete, we can cause ourselves to do that task better, and thus mastering our skills at the task (geniustypes.com). Malcom has a similar step to success which is the 10,000 hour rule. The 10,000 hour rule can be associated with Brain Lee’s focus and persistence steps. However, focus and practice share similarities but are essentially different. The ability to practice for the enormous amount of hours can usually only be done through immense amounts of focus and persistence.

The second step to success is to minimize resistance. Resistance can be thought of freedom as an alternative. The freedom to do what you want without being criticized is missing from civilization. The debt the average citizen is in locks down that person’s ability to be openly creative and take risks. We are further restrained by the emotions we constantly retain, the fardels of our day-to-day life, and the pressures of society. (geniustypes.com). If an entrepreneur is in debt, they are focusing on how to get out of debt, where-as they should be focusing on how to start up a business. However in *Outliers* the topic of resistance is never touched upon showing that resistance is not part of the “formula to success”.

**Section V: Conclusion**

Success is sought after by people who want to become more in life. The challenge for many is analyzing how exactly one can become accomplished in life. The steps to success seem to be skewed, unless one is blessed to have found the “secret” of becoming more in life. The variables are the amount of Practice, the opportunities that come from your birthday, preparation and general opportunities throughout life. When one person is blessed or simply obtains the four “ingredients”, they too can then create a successful life. Fame and fortune is no longer a hazy mystery that descends upon the chosen, it is actually a set of variables that formulate an outlier.



**Section VI: Works Cited**

Works Citied

"gladwell dot com - biography." gladwell dot com - malcolm gladwell, blink, tipping point and new yorker articles. 5 May 2009 <<http://www.gladwell.com/bio.html>>.

Lee, Brian . "Three Steps to Success for Creative Geniuses | Genius Types." Genius Types Creative Life and Passive Income. 5 May 2009 <[http://geniustypes.com/3\_steps\_to\_success\_ for\_creative\_geniuses/](http://geniustypes.com/3_steps_to_success_%20for_creative_geniuses/)>.

Maxwell, Dominic. " The 10 secrets of Malcolm Gladwell's success - Times Online ." Arts & Entertainment News, Features, Interviews | Times Online . 5 May 2009 <[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\_and\_entertainment/stage/article51 88315.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/stage/article51%0988315.ece)>.

Gladwell, Malcolm. Outliers. London: Little, Brown and Company, 2008.

